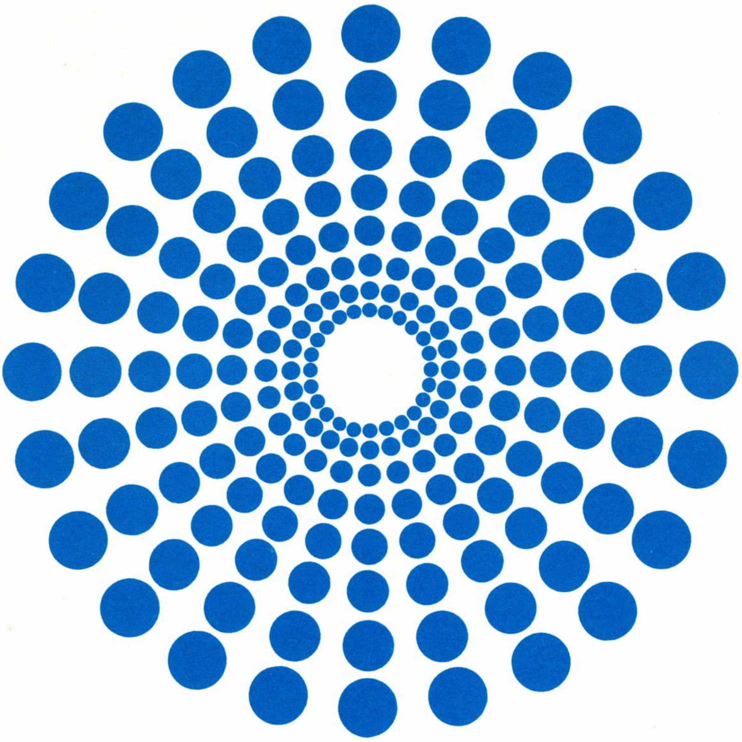
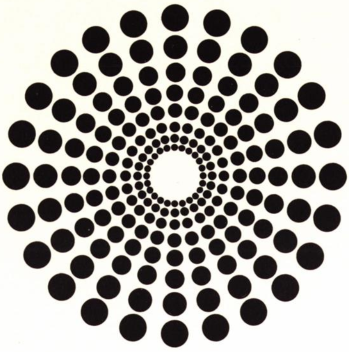


the magic theater

The TOLEDO MUSEUM of ART



the magic theater

AN EXHIBITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ART, COMMISSIONED TO THE NELSON GALLERY OF ART AND ATKINS MUSEUM BY THE PERFORMING ARTS FOUNDATION, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

January 18, 1969 through February 23, 1969

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART
TOLEDO, OHIO

THE MAGIC THEATER

It is clear that dramatic situations are often demanded by people for release from the problems of our time. Light shows take on a ritualistic aspect. Protest often has a theatrical aspect, even in marches. More ceremony is involved sometimes than ideas, more display than programs and solutions. There is a boredom in the affluent society that cries to have the mind occupied and penetrated by stimuli, bombarded into new areas of experience. Even mod clothing, the vocabularies used in rock-and-roll ballads, and psychedelia in general have about them an aura of stylization, of mind-catching display, that answer our emotional demands. In a sense, by observing all these rituals we are already creating a sort of "theater without walls," without proscenium, but dramatic in its impact upon individuals in changing time and space.

Yet one may wonder what the spiritual value of these demonstrations is and whether they answer our natural desire for deep and prolonged aesthetic response. The Beatles are one thing, the Monkees another. Is it not time to separate substitute experience (topical displays) from those lasting values (art) which can filter through to the deepest chambers of aesthetic response? There has been some confusion about this even in the art world. It isn't enough to be "in"—to make a vague gesture toward psychedelia at Arthur's or to have seen The Dancing Waters. We should do much more in order to realize for ourselves the magical properties of the fourth dimension, time, and its corollaries of programming and change. For the road to perceptuality lies along the fourth dimension. But we should travel within the framework of mind-catching art, in order to meet our time upon its own terms.

Hence the concept behind this "magic theater" exhibition—an arena of eight highly programmed aesthetic experiences geared to the end of mental catharsis. In the past, art has been looked at as beauty, as entertainment, as social content, as abstraction, as illusion. Now it is to be experienced through the mind as perceptual infinity on a continuous basis. In this space age there is really no beginning or end to aesthetics any more than with physics. Art exists along the relative scale, and segments of both will attain such intensity as to contain our own being. Less is now expected of the artist, and more is demanded of the spectator. Like the current song:"Lady Madonna, lying on the bed, listen to the music playing in your head."

The old idea of supremacy of form (sculpture, painting, modeling by line) over sensual response has been superseded by the deeper unity of an unceasing interplay of energies (electric, gaseous, sonic, reflective, and timed or timeless). In the Magic Theater there are no "facts." There are only messages distilled through a changeable value system as one relates to the flux and flow, to the imponderables, to the forces of change dynamism—to the mental bombardment of the Magic Theater's various exhibits.

One has to allow these eight pieces, considering the wide range of psychic impulses they generate, to penetrate the senses. Acting and being acted upon in this way will change the ultimate identity of our basic mental reactions and make them over into self-changing self-renewing energies. This is participation, involvement, communication at the level the times can understand and work with. The interplay and recreation of sensations within the mind are the essence of Magic Theater art. It denotes here the beginning of an art of the future in which imagination will be raised to the n^{th} power, because it will be released into the mind rather than expended on forms located outside the psyche. What these artists are searching for is a unity based on magical transference, upon the occult power of light, transcendental reflection, electricity, and self-changing forces.

What is magic about the Magic Theater? It is the desire of the artists to induce creative states within us, to bring about designed and planned sensory experiences, whether the programming of these experiences be random (and left for the observer to collate) or highly calculated. That is why the collaborator (the visual participant) in this exhibition has to stare into Antonakos's "Walk-On Neon," or let himself expand mentally into the spacelessness of Landsman's "Infinity Chamber" or lose himself within the open ended confines of Ross's prism forest. In this process of collaboration—part of the catharsis-inducing mechanism—there is much shifting of powers of mental relation, and this is echoed in the transcendental nature of the materials used to package these experiences, no matter how highly manufactured.

These artists are interested in phenomena of occurrence and change, exploration of points where sensations merge and detonate within the mind, in matters of interchange and transparency: where the parts of our mental being meet and separate. If there is a dominant hue in this "theater" it will be silver—highly symbolic of transparency—the silver of mirror, from luminous to dark, the sheer qualities of aluminum, the transparency of light, the brittle strength of silvered mylar, the collative transparency of glass, lucite, and acrylic, as imbedded in the silent absorption of dark ozite floor coverings and silent surfaces of black formica. Against this transcendence the colors of neon gases, the flashings of strobe lights, the hues of colored filters will strike the senses like signs pointing the way toward myriad subliminal encounters.

Yet, as a theater cannot exist without stage and setting, the Magic Theater cannot exist without environmental control—without the most exquisite and careful packaging. It is one of the faults of recent art that the "packaging" was often scruffy and poor, crudely executed to the point of interfering with interplay of psychic factors. For this reason the polished knowledge of many industries has been placed at the service of the participating artists. Engineers, architects, electronic experts, welders, pattern makers, fabrication experts in aluminum and steel, glass cutters, neon benders, master carpenters and painters are some of the industrial production talent used in mounting the Magic Theater—to a degree never before used in art. In a project involving dozens of companies and hundreds of people from executives to truck drivers and movers, the complexities of organization and production thus far stand unique. People, materials, and technology have been coordinated at so many far flung levels that the process can be likened to putting together a Saturn moon rocket. But the many changes made in the manufacturing process were interpretive of the artists' interest, like changes made to ensure the proper function of any complicated product.

Each artist was selected on two criteria: that he had to have (at least in a transient state) an idea for a project he was literally itching to accomplish, but which was monumental to the point that it could not be accomplished without massive technological collaboration, and secondly that his project fit carefully into the cool, precise format of the Magic Theater idea. The true way into a mentally conditioned, technologically advanced perception does not reside in flash, bang, and crash aesthetics, but in programming so exquisitely controlled as to pierce like a laser beam, creating situations not unlike the emanations from a pure artistic laboratory.

Some of the pieces are more recognizably dramatic (Whitman); others are so transparent as to personify the nether edge of creativity (Ross); but all lack superficial showiness. Thus the Magic Theater is more advanced than earlier environmental exhibitions such as "Sound, Light, Silence" in that it is a *totally* created situation, a planned voyage for the viewer, without precedent, in which transitory psychedelia have been culled out in favor of purer psychic considerations—so that the viewer becomes the subject. The tables have been turned. In a sense we become *part* of the work and enter into it. The transitory elements referred to have ended in the actual theater ("Hair," "The Conquest of the Universe") where they belong. What we have in mind here is unlocated theater, contained to be sure, but in which the containers are means, not ends. The end is not psychedelic art, but psychic theater.

In an age when technology is making more of our decisions for us do we not want to make sure the artist will be there, designing at the forefront, abreast of the technological advances and involved in the decision-making process? Technology involves more than one stratum of perception and countless approaches. Multi-level experience can be packaged in a single container but can be all the more resolute because of the principle of containment. Environmental art makes an ideal chrysalis for bringing together a totality of experience as opposed to the single-minded media of the past and the detached stationary point of history. One needs to know nothing of actual history to get with this Theater. Instead of looking at art through a window, we can be inside looking out as in Landsman's infinity chamber, be within sound as in Jones's sonic games room; or as in the case of Mefferd's strobe lights, they can literally be retained within our being.

Inside looking out: that seems a more valid station to take in this day and age. Let us hope that the real bombardment of the future comes not horribly from without, but benignly from within, and that the stimulation—the messages—enable us to face inwardly what we can never outwardly conquer.

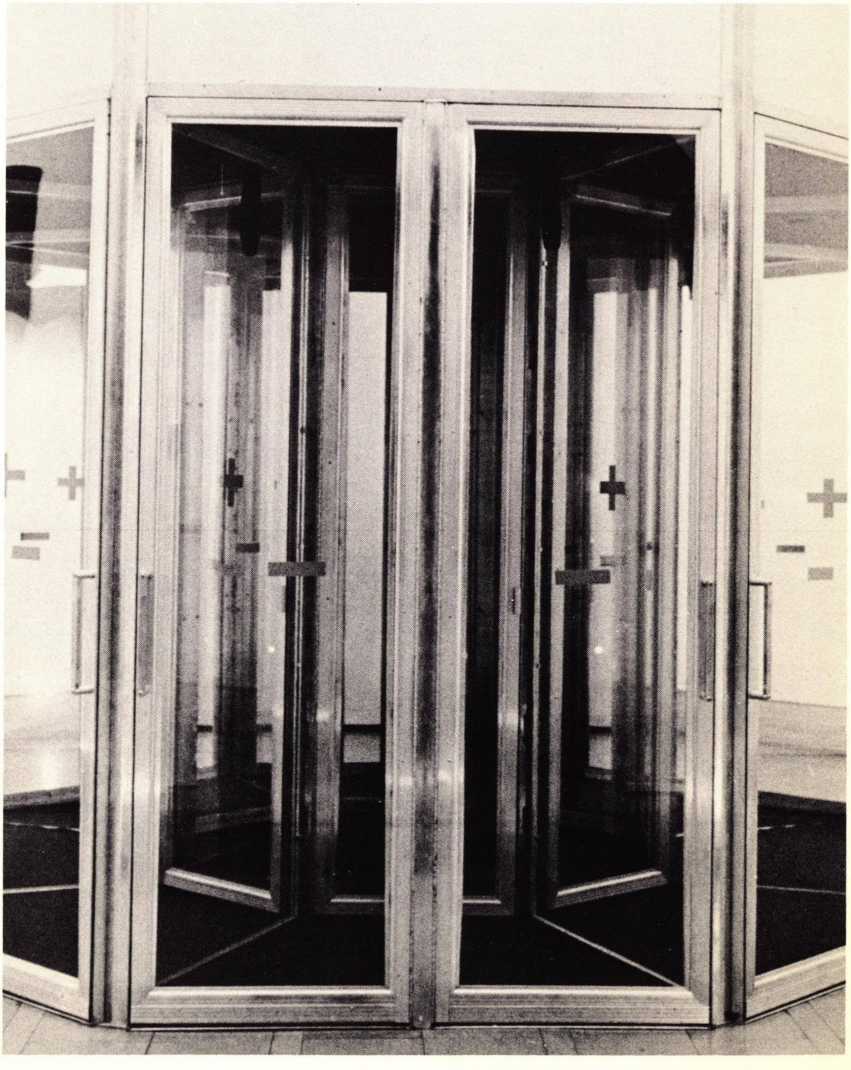
Ralph T. Coe Assistant Director
Nelson Gallery of Art
Director, Magic Theater Exhibition

TERRY RILEY: "TIME-LAG ACCUMULATOR"

Within Riley's aluminum, mylar and glass labyrinth are microphones and tape units to record every noise the visitors make. The recording mechanism mixes the sounds from all 9 chambers before they are replayed, resulting in a "collage of noise." As the work's name suggests, replays are not instant, but each tape unit is delayed, some as long as two minutes.

Riley, a composer, is concerned with musical rather than visual effects as the work produces its random selection of past sounds. While he designed the electronic mechanism and general plan of the work, an architect was needed to draw up blueprints, which were then executed by two Kansas City companies. Riley was asked to contribute to THE MAGIC THEATER in the belief that new artistic situations will arise from such free juxtaposition of perceptive talent.

Riley, a native Californian born in 1935, is known as a composer, soprano saxophonist and a keyboard virtuoso. He obtained his B.A. from San Francisco State College and his M.A. from University of California, Berkeley. In 1964-65 he was instrumental in organizing The San Francisco Tape Music Center. Working as a composer/performer in mixed media theater, he has made concert tours of Europe (1962-63 and 1967) and the U.S.A. Recent performances of his own work include "Poppy Nogood," for soprano saxophone and time-lag accumulators, presented at two summer festivals in 1967, and a music, light and dance piece ("Terry Riley Presents Poppy Nogood's Phantom Band, Purple Model Fire Strobe Ecstacy, with the Daughters of Destruction") for "Intermedia '68," a series of mixed media programs presented at six New York colleges. The artist lives in New York.

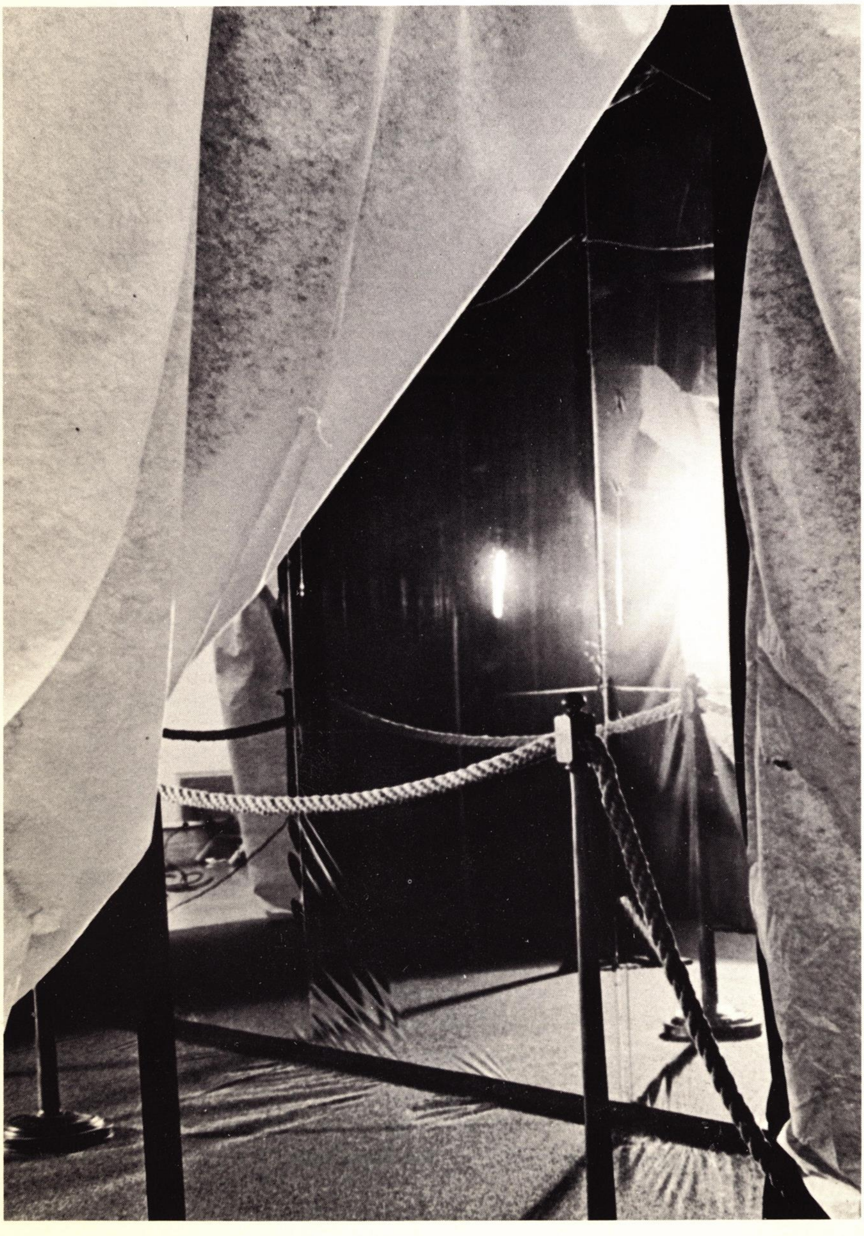


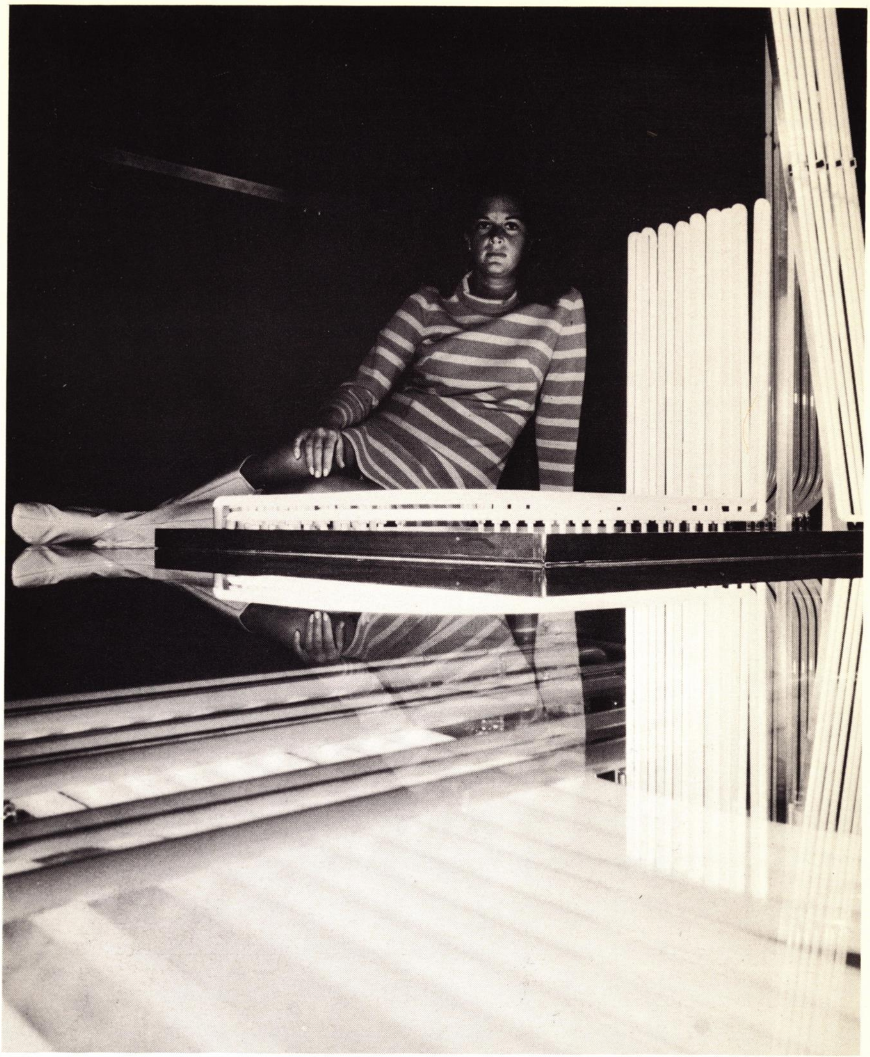
ROBERT WHITMAN: "VIBRATING MIRROR ROOM"

Three mirrors made of stretched mylar hang within a dimly lit black chamber. Suddenly viewers see themselves in a pulsating blue light; the images break apart into weird throbbing shapes. Unusual sounds heighten the mood of the environment. Then, as quickly as it all began, the room dims and the action stops.

Whitman moves his mirrors with oscillating mechanisms for the two smaller units and a vacuum pump for the larger. The rate of movement is programed through stages of sawtooth and undulating motions.

The artist was born in New York, New York, in 1935. He majored in English literature at Rutgers University (B.A. 1957) and has attended Columbia University. His background in the theater (he has performed and designed contemporary theater pieces in New York since 1960) combined with activities as an artist gives him an excellent background for his recent environments. His first one-man show was at Hansa Gallery, New York, 1959. Since then he has had three additional one-man shows and has been included in several group exhibits. The artist lives in New York and is presently working with laser beam projections.





STEPHEN ANTONAKOS: "WALK-ON NEON"

In "Walk-On Neon" multi-colored tubes pulsate in programed patterns beneath the viewer's feet, and a 16 foot column of changing colors soars into space from the center. Each change of colors is accompanied by the clicking sound of solenoid switches. Sequences of color patterns last as long as 27 minutes without repetition. The total effect of the work has been described as crossing a river of colored lights or walking over a rainbow.

Although Antonakos has been working with neon tubes for several years, many new technological problems were encountered in this work. Special glass for the raised floor that could support the weight of several people had to be designed. (Toledo's Libbey-Owens-Ford Company volunteered to solve this problem.) Commercial timing devices to control the light sequences were inadequate, so special units had to be constructed. Supporting the central fountain of color presented problems, since the neon tubes are among the longest ever to be bent and suspended.

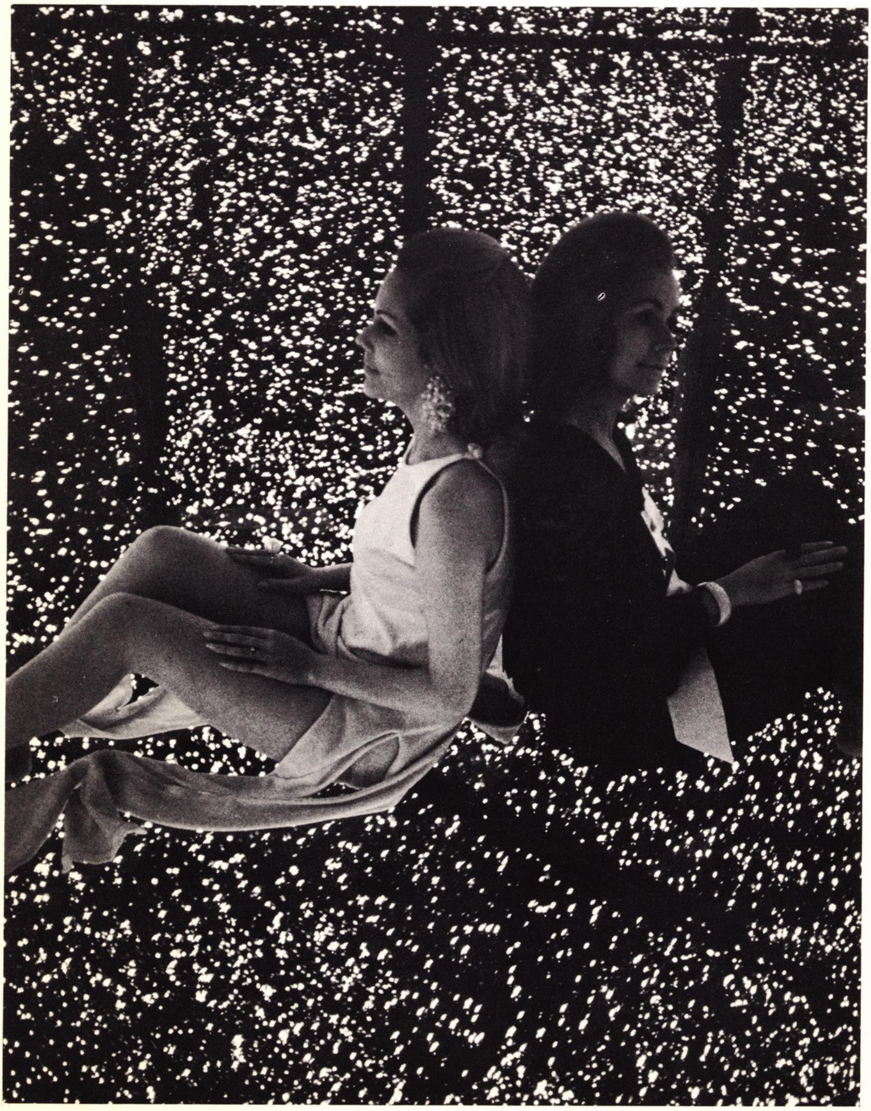
Antonakos, born in Greece in 1926, came to the United States with his parents in 1930. After studying at the Brooklyn Community College, University of Maine and at the Brooklyn Museum of Art School, he worked twelve years as a commercial illustrator. His work in the fine arts began with a series of constructions in 1954, inspired by an exhibition of the Italian artist Burri. Although he occasionally used neon signs as part of his constructions, it was not until 1962 that he constructed his first works chiefly of neon. He has had seven one-man shows, his first at the University of Maine, 1958, and he has been included in numerous museum exhibitions. The artist lives in New York and teaches at the Brooklyn Museum of Art School.

STANLEY LANDSMAN: "WALK-IN INFINITY CHAMBER"

Six thousand miniature lights are endlessly reflected in a room made of mirrors. Entering Landsman's work takes you through the "looking glass" to infinity, inviting you to stand in the center of the Milky Way, even to experience an outer space sense of weightlessness while exploring the artist's depiction of the universe.

Although other men have created rooms of mirrors (*Galerie des Glaces,* Versailles) and covered ceilings with stars (Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna) Landsman combines the two effects to produce a new and challenging environment. The points of light are placed between two mirrors, one a one way or see-through unit. Wires and the slim rods supporting the lights are positioned in holes drilled through the standard mirror. When the work was ready to be assembled in Kansas City, an estimated 70 volunteers put in a total of 3,000 hours helping Landsman to wire and assemble the work, doing two months' work in two weeks.

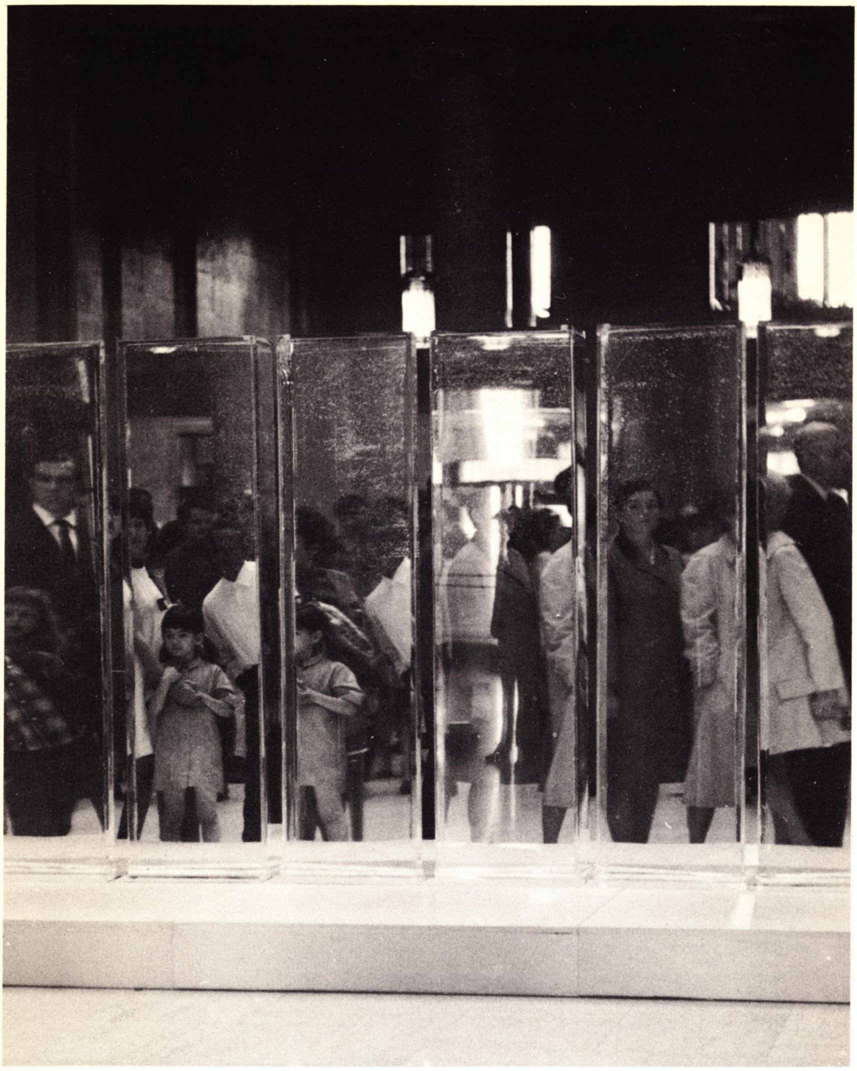
Landsman, born in New York, New York, in 1930, has studied at the University of Mexico and at Adelphi University. He established his reputation as an abstract expressionist before switching to plexiglas and glass mirror constructions. His work has been seen in group exhibitions since 1957, and he is represented in the permanent collections of the Whitney, Museum of Modern Art and other important galleries. He has had one-man shows at Richard Feigen Gallery, Los Angeles (1965) and at Leo Castelli, New York (1966). The artist lives in New York and is presently working on a 25 foot column to be hung in the new Neiman-Marcus store in Houston.



HOWARD JONES: "SONIC GAMES CHAMBER"

Howard Jones' environment translates the spectator's motions into electronic sounds. Interrupting the light beam (five photo-electric cells are housed in each shimmering aluminum unit) triggers the complex circuitry that produces the sounds. The sonic range of the work is from frequencies so low they can only be felt, to others inaudibly high. The viewer becomes artist as he learns how best to play this giant musical device.

The artist was born in Illion, New York, 1922. He has studied at The University of Toledo, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Syracuse University (B.F.A., 1948) and Columbia University. He served in World War II as a fighter pilot. Jones presently lives in St. Louis where he teaches at Washington University. Formerly he has taught at Tulane University (Louisiana), Florida State University and Yale. In 1953 he began to experiment with light as a subject for aesthetic investigation; however, it was not until 1963 that he turned to light and sound as his principal concern. He has been exhibiting his electronic art in one-man and group shows since 1963.



CHARLES ROSS: "PRISM ENVIRONMENT"

The work of Charles Ross is designed to be looked through as well as at. The six-foot prisms are made of acrylite plastic and filled with mineral oil. Alone, the row of eleven monolithic forms creates a sense of silence; however, the element of human motion brings into play the prisms' ability to produce intriguing distortions. Contemplation as well as participation is essential for full enjoyment of the work.

The apparent fuzziness of some of the images seen through the prisms in this black and white photograph is due to the dispersion of the component colors of the light as it passes through the prisms. In actuality each person or thing is ringed by a halo of its spectrum colors.

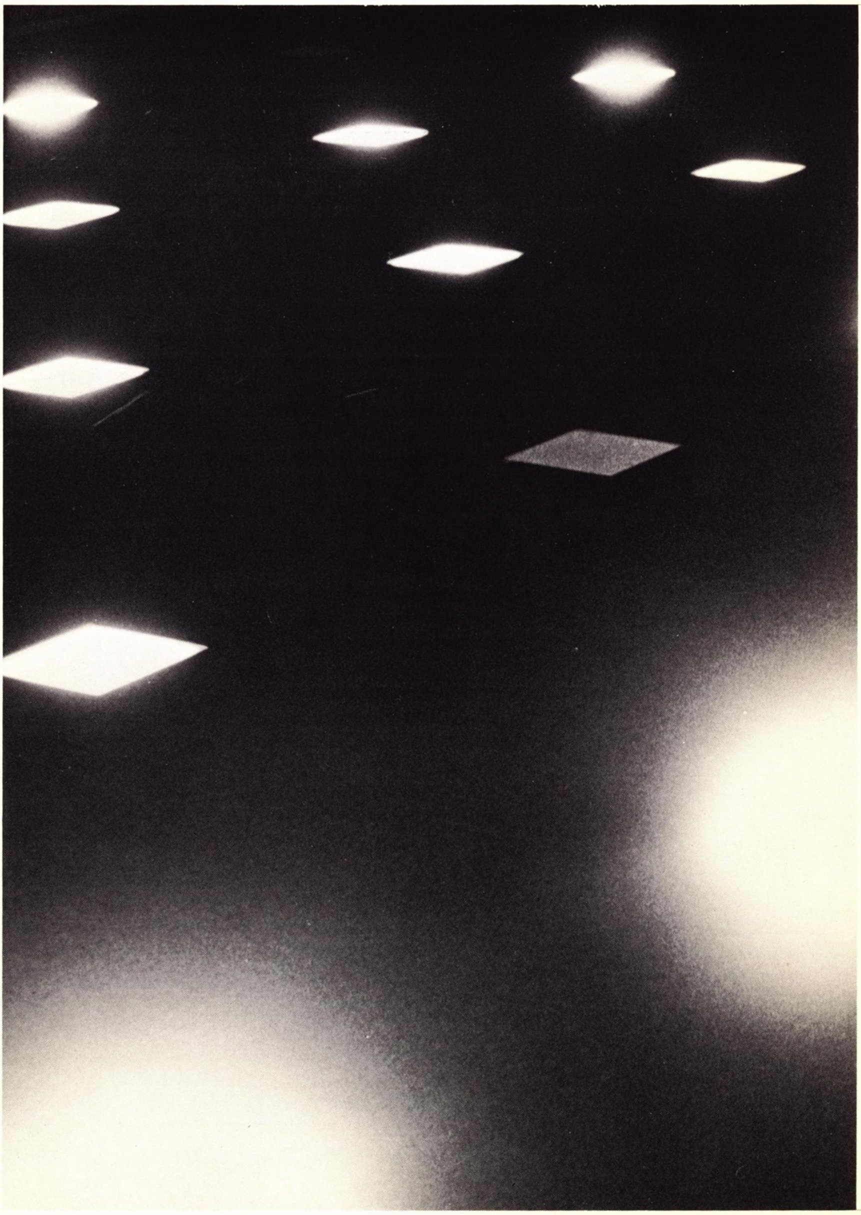
The artist, born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1937, has studied and taught at the University of California, Berkeley. Besides working in sculpture he has collaborated in dance performances in New York and San Francisco. Since his first exhibit in 1961 (Delexi Gallery, San Francisco), Ross has had several one-man shows in California and New York and has been included in several major exhibitions. The artist now lives in New York.

The new technology used in THE MAGIC THEATER is not without problems. During the Kansas City showing of "Prism Environment" leaks were detected. Simple patching was impossible since excess glue would spoil the effect of the pristine surface. While scientists are still searching for the right formula, it is expected that the work will be shown in Toledo.

BOYD MEFFERD: "STROBE-LIGHTED FLOOR"

Frozen movements and fascinating after-images are created in Boyd Mefferd's contribution to THE MAGIC THEATER. Strobe lights placed under lucite panels in the floor fire at random in the otherwise dark room. These split-second flashes of light appear to be white, but several are projected through filters to leave colored after-images. Senses of space and equilibrium may be effected by the sharp, intense bursts of light. The participant may find himself dislocated from the confines of the room into undefinable reaches of space as lighted fragments of the world float freely behind his eyes.

Mefferd was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1941. He received his B.A. from Brown and his M.F.A. from Rhode Island School of Design. His interest in electronics began to develop in 1963 while he was in graduate school. Although he is a newcomer to the art scene, his work has been seen in four major group exhibitions and he has had one-man shows at the Tennessee Fine Arts Center, Nashville, 1967; Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1968; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1968. Mefferd has taught at the University of South Dakota and Wisconsin State University, Whitewater, and is presently teaching sculpture at the Kansas City Art Institute. The work in THE MAGIC THEATER is his first strobe-light piece.

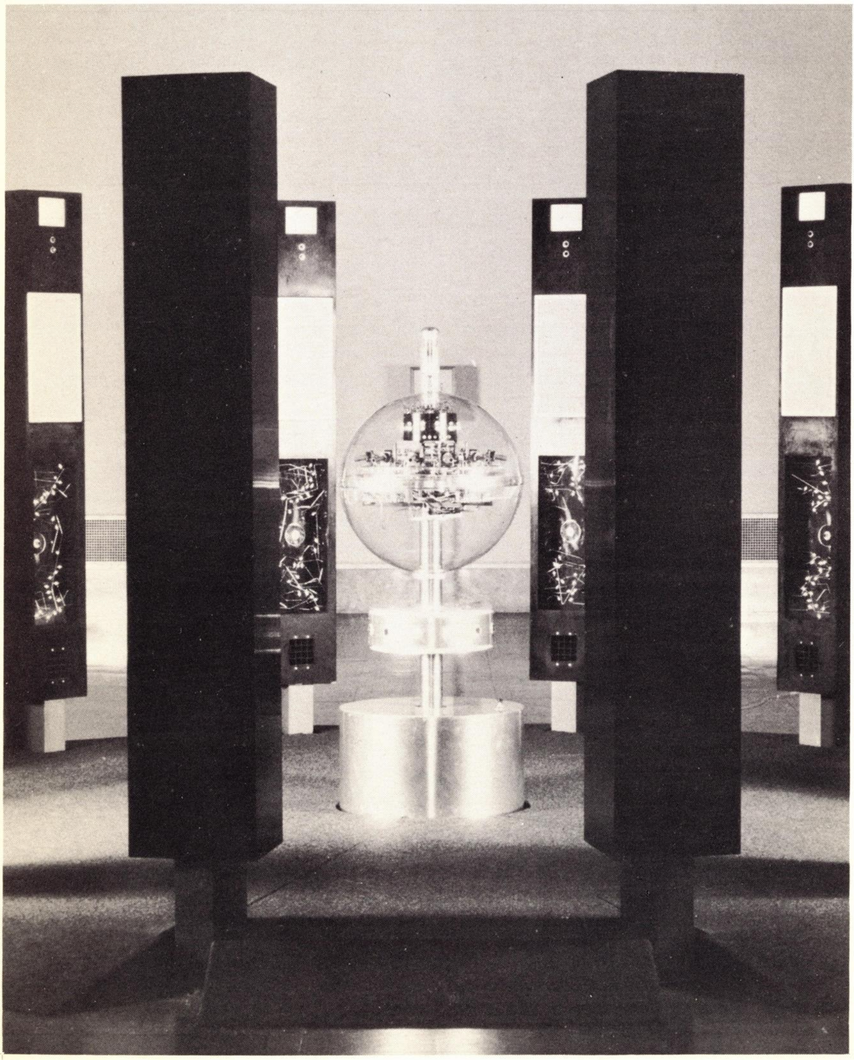


JAMES SEAWRIGHT: "ELECTRONIC PERISTYLE"

Electronic devices create a space age symphony of light, sound and wind in the "Electronic Peristyle." The work performs when visitors' movements break electrical beams between the electronic brain in the center and the tall columns. Each column contains similar equipment including identical circuit boards that control the lights, sound programs and blowers. It takes experimentation on the part of the visitor to discover the potential of the work.

The graceful proportions of the twelve black formica-covered columns and the shape of the plastic and steel control center have caused many visitors to relate the work to Stonehenge or a Gothic cathedral. Although the design qualities may remind us of ancient monuments, the choice of building materials and the highly evolved electronic aspects are firmly rooted in the mid-twentieth century. Just as sophisticated as the design, materials, and wiring is the artist's superb control over the effects he creates in this new electronic environment.

Searwright, a native of Mississippi, was born in 1936. After graduating from the University of Mississippi in 1957, he served in the Navy principally as an engineering officer, where he began to develop his knowledge of electronic gadgets and machines. Moving to New York in 1961, he worked as a stage technician and studied sculpture at the Art Students' League. Since 1963 he has been employed by the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, both as a technician and instructor. His first one-man show was held in 1966 at the Stable Gallery, New York. Since then his work has been shown in several major museum exhibitions including the Whitney and Museum of Modern Art.



MANUFACTURING CREDITS*

TERRY RILEY *Time-Lag Accumulator*
Fabrication: Framework: Grasis Fabricating Company, August Grasis; Craig McSparren; Dan W. Gist
Doors: Coronet Aluminum Company (a subsidiary of King Louie International).
Aluminum: A. M. Castle and Co.
Architects: Ron Steinhilber; Stuart Hutchinson
Sound engineering: David Beatty

ROBERT WHITMAN *Vibrating Mirror Room*
Mylar mirror electronics: Walter Carolan, Jr.
Vacuum operated mirror: Marc Wilson; Assistant; Perry Huston
Carpentering: Pacific Mutual Door Co., Sandy Lambert
Installation supervisor: Jerome Sutter
Triodetic Structure: Butler Manufacturing Co. (George Mahieu, Engineer)
Textiles: Norkay Woolens

STEPHEN ANTONAKOS *Walk-On Neon*
Metal and metal fabrication: Butler Manufacturing Company, Richard Collins; Dale Philpot (engineer); Woody Hudson (welder)
Neon coordination and supplies: American Neon Supply Company, Donald Dunn
Neon bending: United Sign Corporation, Marion Pickett; Federal Sign and Signal Corporation, Jack Burris; Independence Neon Company, Larry Lotz; Naegele Outdoor Advertising Company, Mike MacGowan
Transformers: Jefferson Electric Company
Heavy duty glass: Libby Owens Ford Glass Company, Peter Orser
Architects: Ron Steinhilber, John Eggen
Wiring: Sell Electric Company

STANLEY LANDSMAN *Walk-In Infinity Chamber*
Glass: Willard Mirror Company, P. K. Willard; Libbey Owens Ford Glass Company (miropane), Peter Orser
Glass drilling: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Industries, Incorporated, Bill Smit; Glaziers: Fred Vermillion, Ed Vermillion
Electrical connectors: Trio Products Company, Joe Bennett
Wiring preparation: Custom Control Manufacturer, Incorporated, M. C. Huckaby
Carpentering: Lewis and Goodman Fixture Company
Glass Installation: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Industries, Incorporated

HOWARD JONES *Sonic Games Chamber*
Fabrication of cases and chamber: Marion Corporation, Clarence Kieffaber; Carl Smith
Architect: John Eggen
Lighting: Lightolier, Incorporated, Rodney Buehring
Engineering assisting Mr. Jones: Oliver Stone
Aluminum: Joseph T. Ryerson and Son, Incorporated, Nelson Wetherell; John Heather

CHARLES ROSS *Prism Environment*
Materials: American Cyanamid Company (acrylite), Rhodes Sargent
Construction: Redman Manufacturing Co. Day Shift: Ken Merrill; Rhodes Sargent; Night Shift: Wood Arnold, II; Victor Campbell; George Terbovich; Patterns: Henry Peaster

BOYD MEFFORD *Strobe-Lighted Floor*
Electronics: Comet Electronics, Incorporated, Ralph Johnson; Don McBeth
Construction: Butler Manufacturing Company; Floor Unit: Robert Crockett; Nelson Gallery of Art: Floor extensions
Glass: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, Bill Smit
Lucite filters: Redman Manufacturing Company
Reflectors: Regal Plastic Supply Company, Ned Simscott
Painting: R. H. Bordner Painting Company
Lumber: Daniels-McCray Lumber Company, Harry McCray, Jr., coordinator Townley Metal and Hardware Company; Sutherland Lumber Company; Frank Paxton Lumber Company; R. L. Sweet Lumber Company; Jack Jones Lumber Co.; Schutte Lumber Co.

JAMES SEAWRIGHT *Electronic Peristyle*
Wood construction: Lewis and Goodman; Fixture Company, Stanley Goodman
Steel construction: Havens Steel Company, Fred Havens
Electronics: Comet Electronics, Incorporated, Ralph Johnson; Don McBeth
Steel rod and globe: Marion Corporation, Clarence Kieffaber
Miniature Mirrors: Westport Glass and Paint
Rug: Jack Rees, coordinator; Ozite Corporation; William Volker Company and cooperating firms of the American Institute of Interior Designers.
Carpet Laying: R. D. Mann and Co.

**As of May 1, 1968.*